

## ARNOLD ARBORETUM

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

## BULLETIN

FLORICULTURE

## POPULAR INFORMATION

SERIES 3. VOL. I

MAY 20, 1927

MANO. 7

26 1927

**Azaleas** are fast opening their blossoms in the Arboretum, forming drifts of brilliant colors here, there and everywhere; the finest display being on the western slope of Bussey Hill. Strictly speaking, Azaleas are referable to the genus *Rhododendron* and cannot be separated therefrom by any fixed characters of botanical value. For garden purposes, however, they are easily separable by their general appearance, their small, thin, and in case of the hardy sorts, deciduous foliage. The flowers of no other group of hardy shrubs present such a range of brilliant colors—white, pink, yellow, orange, salmon to flaming red and scarlet in tones of great purity and vividness. Many species are delightfully fragrant and all are abundantly floriferous. The first Azalea to flower in the Arboretum is *R. dauricum mucronulatum*, which opens its blossoms in April at the flush of early spring, the last is *R. viscosum*, blooming in July. In height of bush they average from 5 to 8 feet but with age may grow 10 or 15 feet tall; all are of shapely habit, branching freely and are usually broader than they are high. Some like *R. Vaseyi* are partial to moist places, others like *R. calendulaceum* flourish on dry banks. But they are all good-natured and easily adapt themselves to a variety of situations. They may be planted in full exposure or under the shade of trees. Most of them are ideal when associated with deciduous trees, especially Oaks, either on the fringe of woodlands or in glades. The flowers of Kaempfer's Azalea (*R. obtusum Kaempferi*) are apt to bleach in full sun and this Azalea is seen to best advantage under the overhanging branches of Fir or Pine. So far as is known none of the really hardy species are subject to disease of any kind, nor are they attacked by insect pests. They demand, however, a lime-free soil. In the Arboretum Azaleas have been very extensively planted and from the end of April until mid-July produce a rich display of color. The collection proper occupies the western slope of Bussey Hill, but there are groups among the Oaks, and clumps by the roadside and by the edge of ponds. As arranged these Azaleas give arresting bits of color in all sorts of unexpected places. Here and there a flame of orange or red, a patch of yellow, a drift of pink or a sheet of the purest white stands forth. In some places, hidden among other bushes, the exhaled fragrance leads a visitor to their discovery.

**Rhododendron yedoense poukhanense.** The first Azalea to blossom (*R. dauricum mucronulatum*) is now past flowering and so, too, is the Japanese *R. reticulatum*, with rich magenta-colored flowers. The lovely pink-blossomed *R. Schlippenbachii*, spoken about in the last Bulletin, is still in full blossom, and so is *R. yedoense poukhanense* on Bussey Hill. The latter is the common Azalea of Korea from the central parts southward and was first introduced into cultivation by the Arboretum as late as 1905. In gardens it is a densely-branched, round or flat-topped shrub from 1 to 4 feet tall and more through, with terminal heads of rosy purple flowers rich in delightful fragrance. It is partly or wholly deciduous and in the autumn the leaves are tinted orange to crimson. The double-flowered Yodogawa Azalea (*A. yedoense*), now frequent in gardens, is a monstrous form of this Korean Azalea.

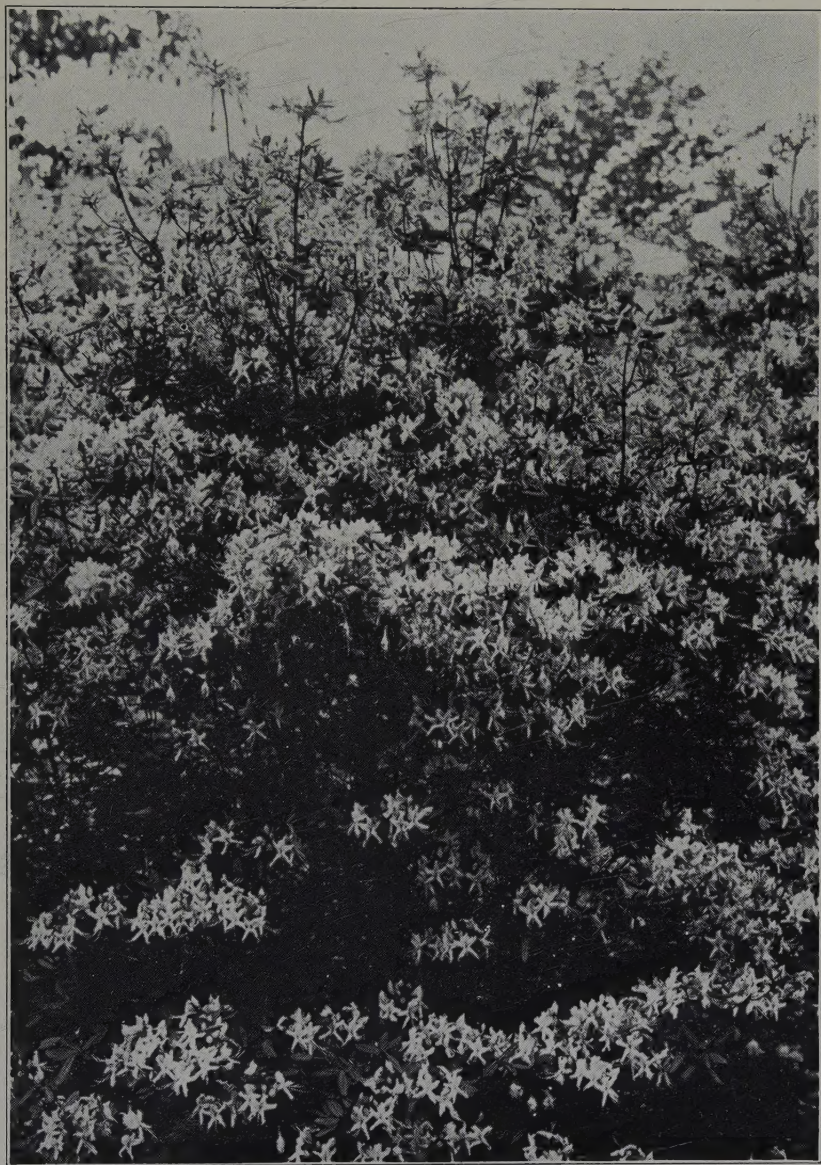
**Rhododendron obtusum Kaempferi.** Kaempfer's Azalea is now aglow with blossoms. This is the common mountain Azalea of Japan, where it is abundant, from the extreme south far into the northern parts of the country, from sea-level up to 4000 feet altitude. It is a twiggy, much-branched shrub from 3 to 10 feet high, with unscented flowers varying in color from salmon to rich red. The flowers last longer and are seen to best advantage when growing in the partial shade of Conifers and other evergreen plants. In full sun their brilliance pales, the colors bleach and the blossoms fade more quickly. In Massachusetts this plant is wholly deciduous but further south the leaves are retained through the winter. Though discovered late in the 17th century this Azalea was not brought into cultivation until 1892, when Professor Sargent sent seeds to the Arboretum.

**Rhododendron Vaseyi.** Of singular elegance and charm is *R. Vaseyi*, whose star-shaped pure pink flowers are now expanding. Rather sparse in habit it loves a moist situation and is happiest near a pond or stream, where tall Willows or other deciduous-leaved trees break the sun's rays and the waters reflect its beauty. Though restricted in a wild state to the high mountains of western North Carolina it is perfectly hardy in Massachusetts. The typical form has pink flowers but there is also one with white blossoms.

**Rhododendron nudiflorum.** Familiar to many is the Pinxter Flower (*R. nudiflorum*), widespread in eastern North America from Massachusetts southward. This is an excellent garden shrub growing from 2 to 6 feet tall and densely set with thin branches bearing in profusion clusters of fragrant flowers, pale to crimson-pink in color, with lobes spreading from a slender hairy tube, the stamens and pistils outthrust. It thrives in any situation and never fails to put forth a wealth of blossoms. Two other species with pink and rose-colored flowers are the closely related *R. roseum* and *R. canescens*. The first-named is the most northern of American Azaleas, being found from Quebec south, while *R. canescens* is found from North Carolina south. Both are broad, irregularly branching shrubs from 4 to 15 feet tall, with fragrant tubular flowers opening before the leaves unfold.

**Rhododendron japonicum.** Sturdy of habit, with rigid ascending stems is *R. japonicum*, widespread on the mountains of Japan. This





Pink and fragrant *Rhododendron roseum*.

has broad, funnel-shaped flowers, each about two inches across, sweetly fragrant, and aggregated six to twelve together at the end of every shoot. The color varies from orange-red to flame red or almost red, and there is a form (*aureum*) with soft yellow blossoms. At its maximum this is a shrub ten feet tall and five feet through, but more usually it is from four to five feet high and as much in diameter. Vigorous of habit, free-flowering and perfectly hardy, this handsome *Azalea* deserves the widest possible recognition. Very closely related is *R. molle* from China, with rich, yellow flowers but less hardy. By crossing these two species the hybrid race of "Mollis Azaleas," of which "Anthony Koster" is a typical example, has been brought into being. Some of these are perfectly hardy and none more so than the handsome orange-yellow "Louisa Hunnewell."

***Rhododendron calendulaceum*** is the Flame-Azalea of the Appalachian Mountains, and right well does it merit the name, for it is one of the most gorgeous of all American shrubs. All who have seen it growing wild extol its beauty, and we who know it in gardens are captive to its brilliance. The colors range from yellow through orange to scarlet, and the flowers, which have little or no fragrance, open with or immediately after the unfolding of the leaves. This *Azalea* grows naturally in open woods and by the side of water-courses, and may be any height from 4 to 15 feet, and as much through. In gardens it is not particular in the matter of site, but massed on a bank or in thin Oak woods it is most effective.

***Rhododendron luteum*** is the Pontic Azalea, an old favorite in gardens under the name of *Azalea pontica*. Of Eurasian origin, this is a floriferous species of vigorous growth, from 6 to 12 feet tall, wide-spreading, with rigid branches and hairy oblong leaves. The flowers are exquisitely scented, clear yellow with outthrust stamens and pistil and are crowded together in clusters at the end of the shoots. This *Azalea* has been much used by the hybridist, and crosses between it and various American species have originated the polychromatic "Ghent Azaleas," without which our gardens would lack much early summer fragrance and color.

***Rhododendron arborescens***. Before the last flowers of the Flame *Azalea* have fallen those of *R. arborescens*, another Appalachian species, commence to open. This is one of the loveliest of all the American *Azaleas* with its large fragrant flowers, pale rose-color in the bud and the purest white when fully expanded. The stamens and pistil are exerted far beyond the spreading lobes of the tubular flowers, and being of a bright red-crimson color add much to the beauty of the blossoms. It is a much-branched shrub, from 8 to 15 feet high, with dark green leaves, lustrous above and pale below, and with the odor of new mown hay. Unlike the preceding species the leaves of this *Azalea* and the related *R. viscosum* are fully grown before the flowers appear.

E. H. W.